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Contribution of Iranian EFL Learning and Teaching Environment to Self-regulated Learning

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IN THE NAME OF GOD

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that “Contribution of Iranian EFL Learning and Teaching Environment to Self-regulated Learning” represents my own work, that it has not previously submitted for any degree or examination at any other university, and that all the sources that I have utilized or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

Hussain Abdulhay
June 2012

ABSTRACT

The study sought to probe the relationship between classroom learning environment perceptions conceptualized as autonomy supportive and self-regulated learning of 202 adolescent Iranian traditional classroom-based college students at two state universities in Kashan and Qom and one private university in Qom. Data was garnered via hand-out questionnaires viz. Learning Climate Questionnaire and Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire and were paralleled with each other to fathom the degree of correlation between their variables. Data collected were processed through Pearson product-moment correlation and linear stepwise regression analysis. Strong positive relationships were found between classroom environment conceived as autonomy supportive and use of self-regulated learning strategies. Additionally, Pearson correlations indicated that control of learning beliefs and self-efficacy components of MSLQ were significantly positively related to each other ($r=0.521$) and to the cognitive and resource management strategies and together under the umbrella term of motivational beliefs significantly interrelated to students' self-reported use of learning strategies. Self-efficacy, separately, was significantly correlated more with the use of elaboration strategies. These findings support and extend prior research in traditional classrooms indicating that students' motivational beliefs about a learning task are related to their use of SRL strategies. Moreover, the results from regression analyses revealed that teachers' answering to students' questions and acknowledging confidence were significant positive predictors of students' use of various self-regulated learning strategies. Further regression analysis unveiled teachers' answering to students' questions as the stronger predictor of self-regulated learning.

Keywords: Classroom learning environment, Self-regulated learning, Autonomy support, Self-efficacy, Control of learning beliefs

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

CAS: Coach autonomy support

EFL: English as a foreign language

LCQ: Learning climate questionnaire

LCS: Learning climate scale

MSLQ: Motivated strategies for learning questionnaire

SPSS: Statistical package for the Social Sciences

SR: Self-regulation

SRC: Self-regulation coach

SREP: Self-regulation empowerment program

SRL: Self-regulated learning

TEFL: Teaching English as a foreign language

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

This introduction serves as a brief discussion of self-regulated learning, academic self-regulation, and the role of learning and teaching environment specifically support of autonomy by teachers in students' self-regulated learning. The statement of the research problem and the purpose of the study will also be discussed. In addition, the research questions and significance of the study will be presented. The terms used in this research will be defined and the organization of the research will be addressed.

1.1. Introduction

To quote Gardner (1963), "the ultimate goal of the education system is shift to the individual the burden of pursuing his own education" (as cited in Zimmerman, 1990, p.4). With the advent of constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978) and the inception of socio-cognitive theory (Bandura, 1997) gradual transition toward learner-centered education invokes teachers and educators to invigorate and train learners to become independent, self-directed, and self-regulated. Learners need to be in charge of their own learning and capable of managing their studies. Schutt (2009) noted that "self-regulation is a primary construct of self-directed learning" (p. 41).

Self-regulated learning emerged as a result of inquisitiveness into "how students become master of their own learning" (Zimmerman and Martinez-Pons, 1990, p.4). It has been the outcome of inquiry into the process of learning by

those learners who have been assiduous and triumphant in their learning despite hindrances to their endeavors (ibid).

Self-regulated learning has been in the limelight over the last three decades. It has grabbed attentions among academics and psychologists. It has its own roots in educational psychology and overlaps in educational and non educational studies and instruction. The concept of self-regulation has gathered momentum in educational psychology consonant with constructivism approach to learning to attend more to the role of individual learner and his needs for better management of his own learning. It has been percolating educational research by highlighting all aspects of individuals which are worth the investigation and consideration for an effective learning to occur. This prompted researchers to pedagogically extend an operational definition for self-regulated learning. Although different definitions have been proposed based on the given theoretical foundation, this conceptualization of self-regulated learners that they are metacognitively, motivationally and behaviorally active participants in their own learning is commonplace among the avant-gardes (Zimmerman and Martinez-Pons, 1990).

Self-regulated learning is congruent with constructivist view of learning and teaching in that it puts learner at the epicenter of learning and construction of knowledge and, thus, it merits more attention in contemporary education. Self-regulation has come to the fore as learner's responsibility for learning and taking active role for constructing his/her own knowledge is much more acknowledged and promulgated in developmental education. The contemporary education acknowledges the centrality of learner and learner's development and seeks to lend assistance to advance this development by considering all aspects of learning

and teaching affecting learners' progress. Knowledge is not any more transmitted to learners; rather, it is constructed in a milieu bound and determined to actualize this entity.

Learners are much more valued in the contemporary educational system in so far as their roles as the builders of knowledge are more appreciated. Constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978) stresses the importance of individual self in manufacturing meaning. It urges that students are the final arbiters of feeding inlet of knowledge to them. In this sense self-regulation is tantamount to constructivism and learner-centered education. Self-regulation is concomitant of this motion in that individual learners are decision makers of their own learning and success. Self-empowerment and adjustment found the cornerstone of this approach to learning and achievement by removing the concept of passivity and acquiescence and confronting outside demotivators and emotional barriers through accommodation and adjustment of strategies.

Self-regulation is currently recognized as a *mélange* of cognition, metacognition, motivation, and affection. Self-regulated learners are capable of regulating their cognition, motivation and affection toward goals they set despite difficulties and hindrance to their wellbeing. Learner's effective self-management of the environmental, behavioral, and personal processes is the most visible indicator of his/her degree of self-regulation (Zimmerman, 1989). It is a quintessence of metacognitive skills and tantamount to 'learning to learn theory' in that it directs and steers learners' thinking and belief processes toward attainment of goals. It assumes the role of self-observation, self-appraisal, and

self-propeller supplementary to learning strategies to improve and beef up individual learning.

The number of studies on academic self-regulation is escalating as the importance of this skill in regulation of motivation, affection and strategies for effective and productive learning has been attested. Academic and non academic education, especially applied linguistics, has enjoyed a great benefit in conjunction with development in educational psychology research. Second language research and studies also continue to benefit self-regulation phenomenon (Harrison and Prain, 2009; Liu, 2008). In the realm of language learning, researches give evidences that self-regulation is a useful strategy for helping individuals become proficient in a foreign language (Graham and Harris, 1994; Zimmerman and Risemberg, 1997). Many tenets emerged as the result of theories and practices construed and constructed by the researchers and educators in these fields.

Acquisition of self-regulatory skills in school and beyond is underscored as a sine qua non for successful and life-long learning (Klieme, Neubrand, Prenzel, Schiefele, and Schneider, 2000). Researches demonstrate that self-regulated learners are ipso facto successful at their academic endeavors (Wolters and Pintrich, 1998) which, in effect, compels the attention of educators and instructors to incorporate much empowerment of self-regulated learning in their teaching programs.

According to Pintrich and Zusho (2002), “Self-regulation is not just afforded or constrained by personal cognition and motivation, but also privileged, encouraged, or discouraged by contextual factors” (p. 279). A cornucopia of

studies document the strong influence of learning and teaching milieu on students' beliefs which eventually impacts students' use of strategies. Effect of schooling on the different dimensions of self-regulated learning has been examined in different fields of study. Leutwyler and Merki (2009) in a longitudinal study spanning for almost two years in a gymnastic school sealed the significant effect of schooling on the development of self-regulatory capacity of young learners.

As stated by Davis and Gray (2007), "Self-regulation is not acquired; it is shaped and developed through participation in environments that provide students and teachers with opportunities to be in control of their own learning" (p.42). Paris and Paris (2001) attach great importance to the role of environment in helping learners gain a wealth of experience in self-regulation. The concurrence of a bolstering context and experience, which spontaneously galvanizes autonomy, broadens self-regulated learning (ibid). This per se invites teachers and educators to cultivate and create a learning milieu conducive to the development of self-regulated learning skills and strategies in learners, accordingly. Self-regulation is not a skill acquired automatically and overnight and like other learning needs to be nurtured and practiced by schooling (Leutwyler and Merki, 2009).

Paris and Paris (2001) assert that helping students become self-regulated not only promotes more independent, competent, and motivated students, but is also likely to elevate their test scores. When students begin to take responsibility for planning, monitoring, and evaluating their own learning processes, self-regulation is established, and learning skills are improved. Therefore, the educators should look beyond the success of passing a standardized test and strive to develop

learning environments that support high-level thinking skills and self-regulation, which have rich and multiple benefits far greater than test scores pages (Davis and Gray, 2007). Tricking learners into academic self-regulation and dispensing gradually with other regulation and co-regulation with teachers and peers seeks a supporting learning environment. The outstanding escalation of studies seals the prominence of the effect of contextual factors and learning environment on the development and enhancement of self-regulated learning.

According to Paris and Paris (2001), “self-regulated learning emphasizes autonomy and control by the individual who monitors, directs, and regulates actions towards goals of information acquisition, expanding expertise, and self-improvement” (p.89). Deci and Ryan (1987) assert that autonomy, relatedness and competence are indicators of self-determined behaviors. Autonomy is concerned with the sense of volition and willingness for engaging in a particular behavior (ibid). Deci and Ryan (1985) assert that self-determination theory necessitates the experience of competence, self-efficacy, autonomy, and social integration for motivational self-regulation.

The conception of autonomy and self-regulation is so intimately intertwined. Ryan and Deci (2006) highlight the need for autonomy as a central element of self-regulatory processes. Littlewood (1999) recognizes autonomy as self-regulation in the form of proactive (utterly set and directed toward goal by one) and reactive autonomy (channelized by others and other source of actions). Autonomy is deemed as an overarching infrastructure of self-regulated learning and practice in relation to the issue of self. It is the manifestation of the self as the agent of activities and responsibility.

Autonomy recurs ubiquitously in every aspect of self-regulation, thus, it is of much significance for the educators to come to assist to enhance and forge self-regulated learning by providing and entrenching more autonomy in learning environments. Classroom structures should encourage students' autonomy and responsibility in the learning process. Students should be able to make choices and feel that they have control over their learning (Sungur and Gungoren, 2009). Autonomy prompts responsibility and engagement in learners. It sets up the foundation of independence and responsibility and propels individuals to toil for reaching targeted destination.

Teachers are vivid designers and conductors of the actual setting for enhancing individual strength and skills. Transition from other regulation and co-regulation by teachers and peers toward self-regulation seeks a fostering learning environment which provides skill and will for self-regulated learning. Designing and providing an environment accountable for both psychological and erudite necessities of learners is the educators' responsibilities en route to building a self-sufficient learner. Support of autonomy by teachers helps learners retain their volitions to take more control of and self-regulate their own learning for achieving the utmost potentialities.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

Learning is a never-ending process that commences at an early age and continues to flourish cognitively and behaviorally by aging. From the outset of early schooling children begin to learn by the help of other regulators. Despite this fact, even cognitively developed; learners are not adequately motivated to take the

helm of their own learning. Many conditions prevail for learners to function properly. Learning a foreign language does not exclude this and is an even more demanding task, in view of threatening to one's own identity, in comparison to acquiring other skills. Even as an adult, language learners are in need of being motivated to pursue their courses of studies determinedly. With the nature of foreign language in Iran and the examination-oriented mentality and teaching-centered approach overshadowing the educational programs, admitted students into the higher education still lack the motivation to self-regulate and acquire education for its own sake. Iranian EFL learners are not sufficiently motivated to do the study on their own parts and self-regulate their learning and become self-directed learners. The reason may be the schooling tradition to which they are accustomed and the beliefs that they hold on to. The teacher-directed and spoon-feeding practices that the students have undergone in the schools train them to be still in need of programming and regulating by others. Being admitted into the universities with these mindsets and experiencing the teaching-centered programs that dominates Iranian EFL colleges, students still exhibit low level of self-regulation and participation.

Ryan and Deci (2002) proclaim the need for autonomy as central to self-regulatory processes. The depletion of autonomy dilutes the development into self-regulated learning. The need for autonomy is more felt for students to separate themselves from the text-based and spoon-feeding nature of education at college levels in the context of Iran where they need to get hold of their own learning, which is also more intensified with the increasingly overpopulated classrooms. Iranian EFL college students need support in this inchoate status to be

revived and renovated from the examination-oriented tendency into an autonomous and a self-directed learning trend.

Boekaerts (1999) questions the researchers and educators' lack of realization of the reciprocal relationships between learning environments and SRL. In this regard, the call for investigating and cultivating environments which are propitious for developing into self-regulated learning in Iranian EFL contexts is expected.

Considering the aforementioned points, the significant contribution of the autonomy-supportive feature of Iranian EFL classroom environments to the student' self-regulated learning is intended to be discerned. It is expected that the results will benefit Iranian EFL students, at the college education and also at the preliminary schooling, by the resultant adjustments and modifications to their learning environments. Likewise, it is hoped that the results help uplift the overall education in the context of Iran through the manipulation of learning and teaching environments, if deemed necessary.

1.3. Objectives of the Study

The study seeks to investigate bachelor, junior, and senior college students' self-regulated learning influenced by their classroom social environment. The effect of classroom environment conceived as autonomy supportive, either directly or indirectly, on some aspects of self-regulated learning behaviors will be determined by correlational analysis. Correlation between motivation and

learning strategies components of self-regulated learning will be ascertained to discern more distinctly the role of motivation in deployment of strategies.

Weiner (1984) cautions based on the conclusion from motivational classroom intervention studies that “any theory based on a single concept, whether that concept is reinforcement, self-worth, optimal motivation, or something else, will be insufficient to deal with the complexity of classroom activities”(p,18). The study tries to build, in particular, on the social cognitive perspective (Bandura, 1997) of self-regulation which addresses the interrelationship between the learner, the learners’ behaviors, and the social environment and also to take on Pintrich’s model of SRL (Pintrich, 2002, as cited in Pintrich, 2004) by underscoring the role of motivation in all phases of self regulation ,viz. forethought, performance and evaluation phases (Zimmerman, 1990), which posits that self-regulated learning is an application of the amalgam of cognitive strategies and motivational beliefs.

The proximity of perceived autonomy to the self-regulatory behaviors in Iranian EFL context will be patently discerned and clarion call for adjustments in educational programs, if deemed necessary, will be promulgated.

1.4. Research Questions

It is hypothesized that students’ perception of learning environment as autonomy supportive would be positively related to their self-reported use of self-regulatory strategies in their courses.